

RE-SB 13 An Act Expanding Economic Opportunity in Licensed Occupations

Chairman D'Agostino, Chairman Maroney, Ranking Member Witkos, Ranking Member Cheeseman and members of the General Law Committee

My name is Vinnie Valente and I am the Training Coordinator for UA Local 777 Joint Apprenticeship Training Committee. I am a member of the Plumbing and Piping Work Examining Board at the Connecticut, DCP and was privileged to serve as the Director of the Connecticut DOL, Office of Apprenticeship & Training from 2012 to 2015. I have earned many trade licenses including Connecticut Journeyman and Contractor licenses for the Plumbing & Piping and Heating & Cooling and Medical Gas piping trades. Registered Apprenticeship as a path to professional licensing will always remain as part of my core belief system.

Connecticut holds a deep and proud tradition in the world of Registered Apprenticeship. The National Apprenticeship Act, the primary document for our national system of apprenticeship is named for U.S. Congressman William Fitzgerald of Norwich, CT. His career of public service also includes time as a Connecticut State Senator and as Deputy Labor Commissioner.

Registered Apprenticeship is truly the "Gold Standard of Training". The synthesis of On the Job Learning in conjunction with Related Instruction in the classroom creates a transformational experience with experienced and knowledgeable mentors leading the progressive improvement of the novice apprentice. Unlike other types of training, the investment by industry in apprenticeship immediately provides measurable returns in productivity.

There are aspects of SB 13 that are contrary to the quality of our apprenticeship system as well as make it harder for currently licensed journeymen to find work in a tightening job market.

Section 3, subsection (b) would allow for either a final-year apprentice or a pre-apprentice to be hired without adversely affecting the hiring ratio in the workplace. While I can see the value in allowing an apprentice in the final phase of their training to be treated with greater autonomy, allowing a pre-apprentice, which is typically a minor child, to count above and beyond the ratio is a dangerously unsafe practice and should not be allowed. Compromises to the hiring ratios were already made in 2017 allowing for 3 apprentices in ratio to the first 3 journeymen. Additionally, ratio relief can be granted by DOL. The process is simple and includes safeguards to ensure the apprentice sponsor can adequately provide proper and safe training opportunities.

In particular I would like to address **Section 8, subsections (a)(1-4)**. The section does not recognize that there are already more than sufficient processes to award **any applicant** the opportunity to sit for a professional license in the state of CT. It does not discern reciprocity from equivalency. The standards of the State of Connecticut throughout all agencies are designed to ensure that anyone practicing a profession is competent in both knowledge and skill sets. Looking to reciprocity under perfectly equal circumstances would be the right thing to do. For the professions affected by SB 13, we cannot draw easy lines to proving that an individual is competent to practice here.

The Fitzgerald Act sets viable minimum standards for the nation. It does not address all the regional needs of any industry. Looking at the national system from the top down starts with recognizing that it is a bifurcated system. The law allows for a state to utilize the Federal Office of Apprenticeship for oversight or to choose to utilize a State Apprenticeship Agency, such as we do in Connecticut. The State of Connecticut maintains higher standards. For instance, while most programs will require 8,000 hours of on the job training to become a fully licensed plumber or electrician, the related instruction requirements are set at 576 in the federal states, whereas CT requires 720 hours in school.

Add to this, not every state requires professional licensing and those that do may enforce only a Plumbing, Heating and/or Electrical standard. This may also be left to a city or county. The deeper that some one looks; it becomes obvious that there are hundreds of possible combinations. So many that is impossible to create a matrix of competencies to prove that a license holder from another state has met the minimum requirements of the State of Connecticut simply by virtue of holding a license for 2 years. Reciprocity does not mean equivalency.

Connecticut maintains many levels of licensing. Thankfully, there is a proven and viable system in Connecticut for an applicant to receive the proper license commensurate with their experience and training. The Examining Boards in respective State of Connecticut agencies allow for a candidate to present registered on the job training hours and related instruction hours and if they do not meet the standards for an unlimited license they may qualify for a limited license status. More often than not a properly trained person will be directed by the board to apply for the license they are qualified for and also given direction on how to obtain the balance of training for the unlimited license.

Finally, the purpose of the legislation is to "expand opportunity". We should direct the energy to creating opportunities for those who are already licensed or enrolled in bona fide apprentice programs already living here in Connecticut. The jobs simply are not here at this time.

Looking at the CT DOL Labor Market Information statistics, construction jobs are shrinking. In December 2018 61,400 people were working in construction jobs. In December 2019 that number dropped to 58,000, a 5.5% drop. This decline began in June of last year and today's work and economic outlook is not improving. While the overall unemployment rate is low as ever, construction is a bellwether industry and since last Summer our unemployment rate has hit and stayed in the 15-20% range. In our own program we have over 230 registered apprentices, 75 of these apprentices are unemployed and would love to go to work in their chosen profession tomorrow. Proportionally, there are just as many licensed journeypersons out of work too. Nothing about making it easier to employ cheap labor preapprentices or softening the standards of licensing is going to help put these unemployed Connecticut residents to work.

Each year we take in hundreds of applications for apprentice positions. Scores and scores of them work in the trades and relate stories of employers that do not register them in their chosen profession. I respectfully ask the SB 13 be withdrawn and we work together to find ways to put local people to work and to stop the abuses of employers who are misclassifying workers and not properly registering them for work.

Submitted Respectfully,
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